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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR TEFFT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/04/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: THE SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH FM VASHADZE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Georgian FM Grigol Vashadze is looking forward to his first opportunity to meet with you on the margins of the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) meeting in Brussels on March 5.

Your meeting with him, no matter how brief, will be an important signal of U.S. support at a time when some leaders in Tbilisi are fearful that our efforts to improve relations with Russia will have to come at the expense of the U.S.-Georgia relationship. The NGC and your meeting with FM Vashadze are opportunities to recognize the restraint and flexibility Georgia has shown in recent weeks and months in regards to the territories and to urge the Government to maintain a measured path and commitment to democratic reforms as we work to re-balance our relationship with Russia. Vashadze is a moderate voice among President Saakashvili's key advisors. We expect that Vashadze will ask you for continued strong support for Georgia's NATO aspirations, offer Georgian support for U.S. and Allied efforts in Afghanistan, and propose the establishment of a framework to implement the U.S.-Georgia Charter signed in January. This meeting will help reassure Vashadze that a lack of headlines for Georgia does not translate into a lack of support in Washington for Georgia's territorial integrity, long-term development and security.

Vashadze - Professional Diplomat with a Plan

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Vashadze plays an increasingly important role in Georgia's government. He was appointed Foreign Minister in December 2008; prior to his appointment he served briefly as the Minister of Culture and as a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is a professional diplomat who began his career in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and received his undergraduate degree from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1981. He speaks English fluently. In our view, Vashadze is the right person at the right time to represent Georgia's interests -- he has consistently served as a voice of moderation when others close to President Saakashvili have urged hasty action. He has proven extremely capable in thinking strategically about Georgia's relations with Russia, and during the August conflict was the Georgian Government's main conduit with Russia, primarily through direct contact with Deputy FM Karasin. At 50 years of age, Vashadze is significantly older and more experienced than his ministerial colleagues. He is known in Tbilisi as a cultured and respected figure, a reputation enhanced by his marriage to Tbilisi's prima ballerina Nino Ananiashvili. Vashadze, although unquestionably a Georgian patriot, has both Russian and Georgian citizenship.

NATO Georgia Commission

¶3. (C) As the Foreign Minister will likely point out during the NATO-Georgia Commission, Georgia continues to take the steps the Allies have urged them to take: consolidating its

control over the territory it currently controls, making progress on democratic reforms and keeping tensions around the conflict areas to a minimum. The Georgians are also hard at work on a new Annual National Plan (ANP) for NATO that they see as crucial to Georgia's membership hopes, and includes democratic and military reforms encouraged by NATO. NGC is an important sign of our ongoing commitment to Georgia's membership, and, in their view, represents Georgia's only opportunity to provide long-term security to Russia's seemingly limitless appetite to control Georgia. Russia's seemingly limitless appetite to control Georgia

14. (C) In a meeting on March 1, Vashadze indicated that he hopes to raise four issues with you, as time permits:

-- He will urge the United States to remain actively engaged on NATO membership issues. Recent rumors in the NATO international staff and among some Allies have suggested that Georgia's commitment to the NATO membership process has waned since the August conflict. In fact, Georgia is working fastidiously to meet the challenges necessary for membership. Vashadze will look to you to signal that the U.S. commitment to support Georgia's membership has not changed.

-- He will offer to allow the U.S. to build or use existing bases or ports on Georgian territory to support our efforts in Afghanistan and to help compensate for the loss of Manas. Georgia's government welcomes any enhanced U.S. military presence on Georgian soil, although it does recognize how neuralgic this is for Moscow. This offer follows on Georgia's announcement that it plans to send a company of troops to support a French deployment to Afghanistan.

-- He will ask about lines of communication to Afghanistan via Georgia. Georgia is willing to facilitate supply lines to support our efforts in Afghanistan.

-- He will urge you to support a framework for implementing the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership and will likely ask that the Administration commit to leading such a commission at the most senior level possible. The agreement was signed in January 2009 and committed our governments to a broad range of cooperation. The framework for implementing this agreement remains under consideration and the Georgian side hopes that we will head this commission at the Secretary-level or above.

#### The Political Backdrop to Your Brussels Meeting

15. (C) Since the August conflict, tensions along the de facto boundaries with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have remained high. Eleven Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs police officers have been killed and many others wounded since the conflict by sniper fire, IEDs and other attacks. For the most part, as advised by the U.S. and the Europeans, the Georgians have not used force to respond to these attacks. International monitors still do not have access to South Ossetia and the UN's movements within Abkhazia are limited. The Georgians signed an MOU with the European Union's Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in which they voluntarily and unilaterally limited their military presence near the territories and provided full transparency on all military movements. To date, the Russians/Abkhaz/South Ossetians have not responded in-kind. In an Orwellian attempt at deflection, the Russians have accused Georgia of increasing tensions by building up forces near the territories, but all three international monitoring organizations -- EUMM, OSCE and UN -- have found that the reverse is true: the Georgians are keeping forces away from the territories, while the Russians, Abkhaz and South Ossetians maintain a significant presence near the administrative boundaries.

16. (C) The prospects for international mediation efforts, as well as continued monitoring on both sides of the administrative boundary lines, are fading. Although the February round of Geneva talks produced a modest success, a proposal for a dispute resolution mechanism, the Abkhaz and

South Ossetians are now backing away from the idea. The Russians meanwhile suggested a late date -- June -- for the next round, which would be too late to discuss new OSCE and UN mandates, both of which expire in June.

17. (C) The fallout from the August war remains a dominant political issue in Georgia, however economic challenges have increasingly become a significant concern to the public. Although many of those dislodged by the war have returned to their homes, those displaced from South Ossetia itself and part of Abkhazia have been largely unable to return. Saakashvili remains the primary figure in Georgian politics, but his wartime decisions have drawn significant criticism from various opposition leaders. Vocal, opposition parties and leaders remain fractured but may coalesce around plans for street protests in April. The opposition leaders do not currently represent a credible alternative to Georgia's leadership. The Saakashvili government appears to be relatively stable, however, a worsening economy could erode public support.

18. (C) As a result of Russia's invasion, President Saakashvili has re-committed his administration to a new wave of democratic reform and we are strongly encouraging him in this effort. The new Prime Minister, Nika Gilauri has Qthis effort. The new Prime Minister, Nika Gilauri has responsibility for the overall direction of the economy as well as the implementation of the \$4.5 billion in pledges from the international community to support Georgia following the conflict. These pledges include \$1 billion from the United States; thus far, \$757.5 million has been allocated and the remaining \$242.5 million must still be authorized and allocated by the Congress.

TEFFT